

TECHWOOD HOMES, BUILDING 3
Olympic Housing Impact Area
559-567 Techwood Drive;
129-135 Merritts Avenue
Atlanta
Fulton County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2257-E

HABS
GA
61-ATLA
60E-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Southeast Region
Department of the Interior
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

HABS
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TECHWOOD HOMES, BUILDING 3

HABS No. GA-2257-E

Location: 559-567 Techwood Drive;
129-135 Merritts Avenue, N. W.
Atlanta
Fulton County
Georgia

U. S. G. S. Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: Northing
3739/560, Easting 741/600

Present Owner: Atlanta Housing Authority
739 West Peachtree
Atlanta, Georgia 30365

Present occupants: Multiple occupants

Present use: Public housing
Part of Olympic Housing Impact Area
To be demolished

Significance: Techwood Homes, Building 3 is a contributing building in the Techwood Homes Historic District, nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. The building is significant for its role within the first federally funded public housing project in this country. In addition to its engineering and construction techniques, Building 3 is one of three buildings that comprise an entire building group (Group No. 101) of the original complex. As a unit, they illustrate the dynamic, integral configuration of built and open space that helped make Techwood Homes an experimental model for subsequent public housing projects.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1934-1936. President Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated Techwood on November 29, 1935. September 1, 1936 marked the official opening ceremony of the project and was proclaimed Techwood Day in Atlanta. No information has been found confirming the exact erection dates of Building 3.
2. Architect: Burge and Stevens. The Atlanta architectural firm accepted an \$84,000 contract to design the Techwood Homes complex, of which Building 3 was a part, on May 17, 1934. Flip Burge, one of the principals, was an original member of the Board of Trustees which secured federal approval for the project.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Housing Division of the Public Works Administration (PWA) of the federal government had original jurisdiction over Techwood Homes. When the Federal Housing Administration was established in 1937, that agency assumed control of the project. The Atlanta Housing Authority was created in June of 1938, under the directorship of Charles F. Palmer, Atlanta real estate developer who had spearheaded the drive to make Techwood the first public housing project in the country. In March of 1940, the Atlanta Housing Authority took over administration of Techwood Homes under a lease agreement with the U. S. Housing Authority.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: J. A. Jones Construction Company of Charlotte, North Carolina built Techwood Homes, including Building 3, at a total cost of \$2,108,337, which included purchase of the land at 49 cents a square foot. No specific information on Building 3's individual costs, contractor, or suppliers has been located, although the construction project resulted in many local jobs.
5. Original plans and construction: Building 3 is a three-story concrete apartment building, with primarily unexcavated basement, comprised of one and two-bedroom apartments, including plan types A (18 units), B (18 units), D (3 units), E (3 units), F (15 units), and G (15 units). Original plans are housed in the Engineering and Capital Improvements Department of the Atlanta Housing Authority.
6. Alterations and additions: The building has undergone one significant period of alteration. In the 1980's, the Atlanta Housing Authority obtained a \$17.2 million grant from HUD through the Comprehensive Improvement Assistance Program. This grant, shared with Clark Howell Homes, was used to upgrade bathroom and kitchen facilities. All kitchen cabinets were restained and painted inside; they were replaced where needed. Bathroom accessories were replaced as needed as were ceilings and ceramic tile areas over tubs. Marble thresholds replaced the wooden ones in all bathrooms. Grab bars and handheld showers were installed in all HDC units.

The grant was also used to install vinyl flooring, new windows, and roofing, to modify closets, add bookshelves, and washer alcoves, and to insulate vent stacks. It provided electrical work, exterior door replacements, and interior painting. Also the steam boiler/electric baseboard heating system was replaced with an energy efficient, gas-fired hot water circulation system (Atlanta Housing Authority 1986, 12). Allain and Associates and James Patterson Associates were the architectural firms that drew the plans for the 1981 comprehensive modernization of Techwood Homes. Newcomb and Boyd Engineers of Atlanta did the plumbing, electrical, and mechanical renovations. Ray Gustafson and Assoc. were responsible for the civil engineering, and Harry Baldwin, landscape architect, also from Atlanta, relandscaped the property.

B. Historical Context

The relationship of Building 3 to its housing block (includes Buildings 1 and 2) and to the rest of Techwood Homes is one of parts to the whole. Building 3 is a functional structure within its housing block. As a complete block unit of one of the original housing groups (No. 101), the three buildings function as a microcosm of the overall design. Together, they illustrate the dynamic, integral configuration of built and open space that helped make Techwood Homes an experimental model for subsequent public housing projects.

An Atlanta Constitution July 5, 1936 article described the enthusiasm with which the opening of Techwood Homes was received:

And if you earn too much or too little, or own your own house, look at the apartments anyway - you will find some ideas for making your own home more livable.

The architects who designed the project know a lot about what it takes to make homes comfortable, and their wives probably contributed a few ideas.

Techwood is indeed an amazing spot. There isn't a millionaire's home in Atlanta that has as many modern improvements or handy appliances.

While no documentably famous people lived in Building 3, such as Truett Cathy, founder of Chick-Fil-A restaurants, who lived for four years down the block at 466 Techwood Drive, or Cecil B. Day, Sr., founder of Days Inn of America, over fifty years worth of families have called Techwood home - families such as Mr. and Mrs. W. C. Steele and their son Powell - who were the first family to sign a lease for an apartment in 1936. In his 1935 dedication, President Roosevelt described what the opening of Techwood Homes and soon-to-follow public housing projects across the country would mean to families whose income qualified them for occupancy:

Today these hopeless old houses are gone, and in their places we see the bright, cheerful buildings of the Techwood Housing Project.

Within a very short time, people who never before could get a decent roof over their heads will live in reasonable comfort amid healthful, worthwhile surroundings

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General statement:

1. Architectural character: Of architectural interest are the narrow transverse dimension of the building and the exterior use of materials, which the National Register nomination describes as "4 inches of selected common brick, bonded every fifth course" and trimmed with cast stone. While original plans specified terra cotta trim around the doors and brick window sills, cast stone was used in actual construction. Also of architectural significance is the dynamic, integral configuration of built and open space achieved by Building 3 as a component of its housing block.
2. Condition of fabric: Building 3 appears to be in good structural condition but is in need of maintenance and cosmetics.

B. Description of exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Building 3 is a three-story concrete apartment building with largely unexcavated basement; storage and laundry facilities, as well as a boiler room, occupy portions of the northern and western sides of the basement. 3 is a J-shaped building and has the following overall dimensions: 156'-0" x 44'-0", 148'-0" x 52'-0", 258'-6" x 52'-0.
2. Walls: Exterior walls are faced with four inches of selected common brick, bonded every fifth course and trimmed with cast stone.
3. Structural systems, framing: The floors and roof are of solid concrete slab construction and are supported by 12 inch exterior walls consisting of eight-inch load-bearing tile blocks and a row of interior concrete columns spaced 18'-2" apart, connected by longitudinal beams, according to the National Register nomination.
4. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Doors are of metal construction, and door surrounds are of stone, featuring a three-light transom. Doorways are located equidistantly along the length of the building. Building 3 has three doorways accessible from the central open space between Buildings 1, 2, and 3, in addition to two doorways on the Techwood Drive side of the building and four on the Merritts Avenue side.

b. Windows: Regularly-spaced windows are located on all sides of the building. They are of metal, double-hung sash construction. Window lights are defined by snap-in mullions. Window openings of vacant apartments are boarded up with plywood panels.

5. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The roof is a solid concrete slab 5 1/2" thick.

b. Eaves: The building has no eaves.

C. Description of interior:

1. Floor plan: Building 3 forms a J shape and is north-south in orientation. Each floor of the building repeats a balanced pattern of one and two-bedroom apartments of the A, B, D, E, F, and G floor plan types. The present unit configuration and composition date from the 1981 renovation.

2. Stairways: Stairways ascend up two floors from each of Building 3's nine entrances. Stairs are of concrete construction, and railings are of metal.

3. Flooring: Floors are of solid concrete construction.

4. Walls and ceilings: Walls and ceilings are of solid concrete construction. Entrance halls are tiled.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Doors are of wood construction and are located on the north, courtyard side, western, and southern-facing sides of Building 3.

b. Windows: Windows are of metal, double-hung sash construction. In each of the building's three stories, a regularly-spaced rhythm of windows moves along every side.

6. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating: The original steam-generated boiler/electric baseboard heating system was replaced with a gas-fired hot water circulation system in the 1980's. Steam was originally piped by Georgia Power Company.

b. Plumbing: All pipes were originally copper. Each apartment in the building has a full bathroom and kitchen.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The housing block which Building 3 is part of is bounded and accessible by Techwood Drive on the west and Merritts Avenue on the south. It was originally accessible from Williams Street on the east until the construction of Interstates 75 and 85 resulted in the loss of that segment of Williams. As a built unit, the three structures making up the housing block configure open space in the form of a central courtyard and rear playground.

2. Historic landscape design: The original landscape plan was laid out symmetrically. It consisted of regularly-spaced street trees, a symmetrical, balanced planting pattern in the central courtyard, and symmetrically-placed interplantings of shrubs around the buildings, including Building 3. The overall effect was one of unity, reinforcing the design concept of an integrated building unit. Original plantings included: Chinese elms (Ulmus pumila) along Merritts Ave., N. W.; and Water oaks (Quercus nigra) along Techwood Drive. Mimosas (Albizia julibrissin) wrapped around the northern side of Building 1, the eastern edge of Building 2, and defined the four corners of the playground. The grassed courtyard was planted with alternating American elms (Ulmus americana), Pfitzer junipers (Juniperus pfitzeriana), and Thunberg Spiraea (Spiraea thunbergii). Shrubs included Crape myrtle (Lagerstroemia indica), Sweet shrub (Calycanthus floridus), and Photinia (Photinia serrulata). It is believed that a number of existing trees are part of the original landscape plan. It seems that other plantings date primarily from the 1981 relandscaping.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings:

Several sets of drawings are available, including:

- original drawings
- drawings dated February 15, 1936
- Atlanta Housing Authority site plan, 1962
- comprehensive modernization drawings by Allain and Patterson, 1981

Photographs of selected examples of original drawings are included in the submittal for HABS No. GA-2257-C, as follows: planting plan and plant list (photo # 15); plot plan and roof plan (photo # 16); basement plan (photo # 17); first floor plan (photo # 18); floor plans for type A and type B apartments (photo # 19); floor plans for type C apartments (photo # 20); elevations (photo # 21); sections and elevations of stairs and entries (photo # 22); details (photo # 23); and schedule of doors, windows, and interior finishes (photo # 24). Original drawings are housed at the Engineering and Capital Improvements Department of the Atlanta Housing Authority.

B. Historic views:

Historic photographs are archived at the Atlanta History Center. A number of newspaper articles and other sources listed in Part III.C include historic views.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Atlanta Urban Design Commission, files.
Atlanta History Center, vertical files, newspapers,
historic photographs.
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Atlanta Preservation Center, file.
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2. Secondary and published sources:

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D. Supplemental material: Following this outline format text are two 8 1/2" x 11" sketch drawings, as follows:

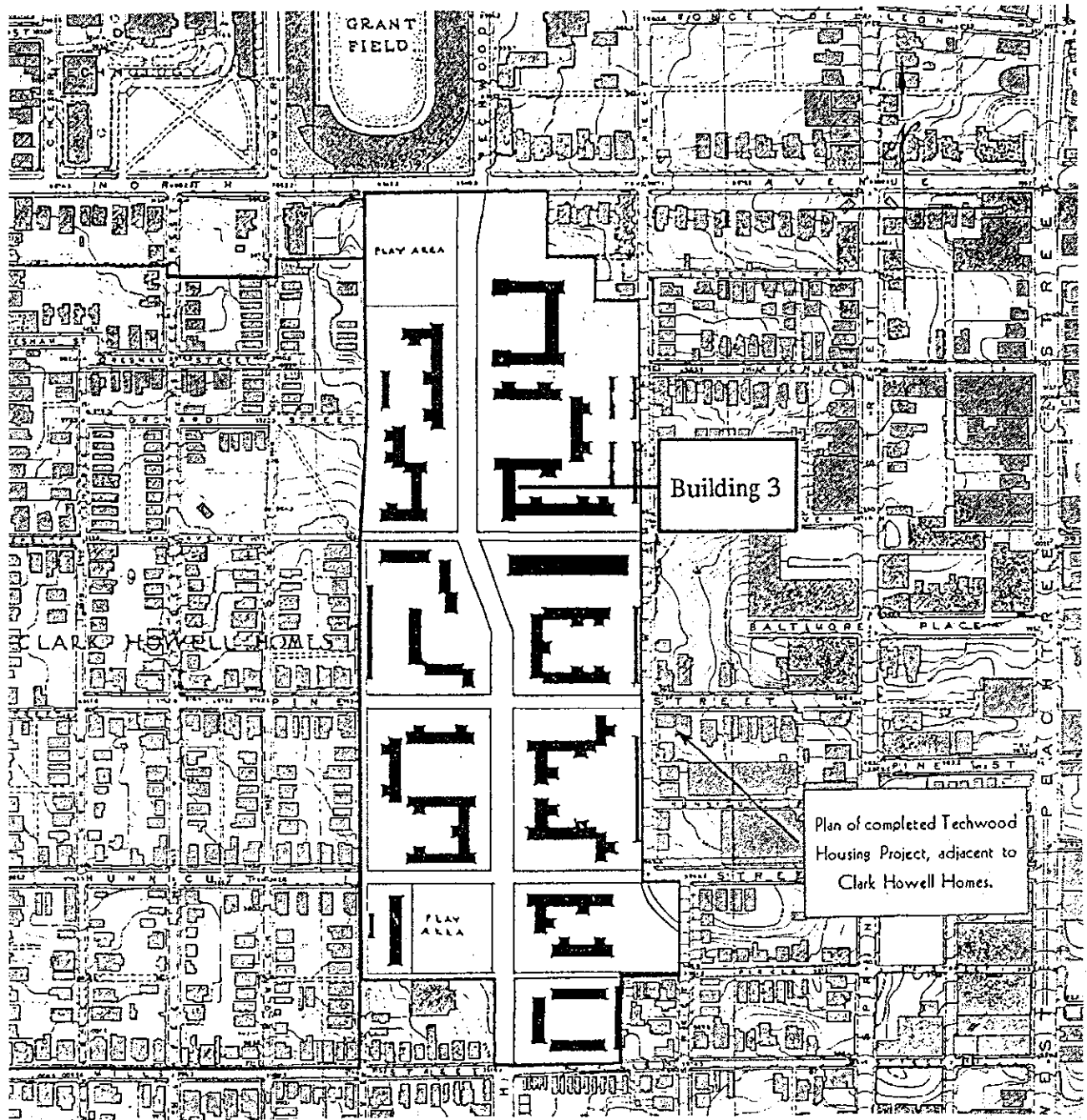
- historic site plan of Techwood Homes with Building 3 indicated
- site plan of existing historic district with Building 3 indicated

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This HABS documentation packet is being prepared in compliance with a stipulation of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that addresses the impact of the Olympic Housing Impact Area on the Techwood Homes Historic District. The MOA is dated March 19, 1993. Parties to the MOA are: the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Board of Regents of the University System of the State of Georgia, and the Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta.

Prepared by:	Lina L. Cofresi
	Rosetta Radtke
	The Jaeger Company
	119 Washington Street
	Gainesville, Georgia 30501
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HISTORIC SITE PLAN OF TECHWOOD HOMES



SITE PLAN OF TECHWOOD HOMES HISTORIC DISTRICT

